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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*French Elections: Results and Outlook*

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23  
24 March 1967  
No. 0628/67

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
24 March 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

French Elections: Results and Outlook

SUMMARY

The Gaullists' one-vote majority in the 487-man French National Assembly is not an accurate reflection of De Gaulle's continuing freedom of action. Even if the Federation of the Left and the Communists are able to translate their successful electoral cooperation into effective action against the government in the assembly, their 199 deputies can expect little support from the Democratic Center. Dissatisfaction within the Gaullist ranks, particularly over the government's social and economic policies, is evident, but such dissidence will be tempered by the recognition that Gaullism is still the principal source of political bread and butter for all members of the coalition. Most important, De Gaulle still holds the major instruments of power firmly in his own hands and can be expected to use all of the considerable leverage he possesses to ensure that his major policies are unchanged. Nonetheless, the election has both revitalized the left and forced the Gaullists to re-examine their own programs and their appeal.

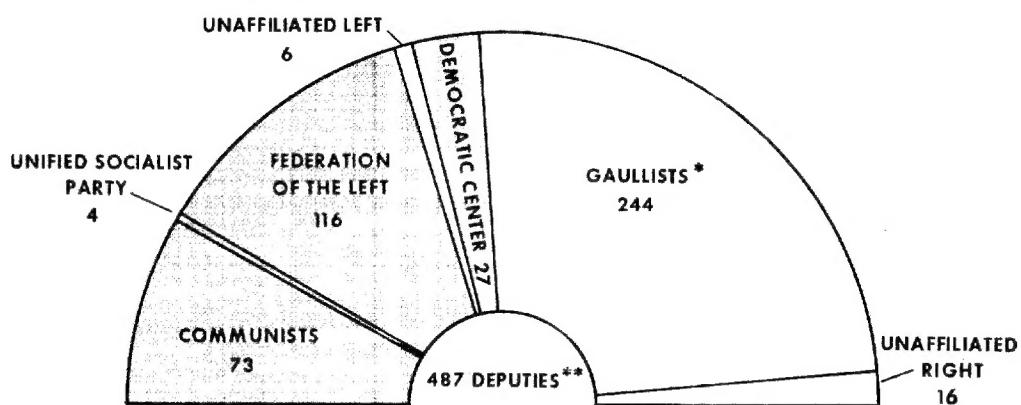
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### PARTY STRENGTHS IN FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ELECTED MARCH 1967



\* Includes 190 members of the Union for the New Republic (UNR) and the Democratic Labor Party (UDT), 44 Independent Republicans, and 10 unaffiliated Gaullists.

\*\* The one seat still unaccounted for is in French Somaliland, which will hold its election at a later date.

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Factors Contributing to Gaullist Losses

1. The Gaullists, who had a margin of approximately 40 in the last National Assembly, have been reduced to a majority of one as a result of the legislative elections on 12 March. A major factor leading to the heavy Gaullist losses in the 487-seat assembly was the unexpectedly successful electoral cooperation between the Communist Party (PCF) and Francois Mitterrand's Federation of the Left. Voters apparently accepted the directives of their leaders to a significantly greater extent than in any national election in recent years.

2. The more disciplined PCF following could usually be counted on to shift its vote as directed, but the willingness of the non-Communist left to vote loyally for a Communist had been in question. A related factor which worked against the government was the withdrawal of the Communists in favor of Federation candidates in some 15 or 16 districts where the PCF had led on the first ballot. This tactic resulted, for example, in the defeat of Minister of Armed Forces Pierre Messmer and of a leading left-wing Gaullist, Louis Vallon. The Gaullists also had expected a greater degree of support from the "swing" centrist vote.

3. In many districts where the contest was between a Gaullist and a leftist, there were numerous centrist abstentions--an indication that the Gaullist tactic of raising the specter of a Communist victory was not notably successful. A former Socialist minister of foreign affairs commented that the Gaullists had damaged their chances in the second round by extolling the virtues of the Franco-Soviet rapprochement while at the same time warning that the Communists constituted a grave danger to French "freedom." Post-election studies indicate that 25 percent of the Center electorate supported a Communist candidate rather than a Gaullist on the second round in the Paris region. An additional factor in the Gaullist setback was the failure of some Gaullists--confident of a victory after the strong showing in the first round--to turn out for the second round. De Gaulle himself pointed out that a shift of only some 10,000 votes had resulted in a loss of 35 seats to the Fifth Republic.

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The Position of the Left

4. The combined force of Francois Mitterrand's Federation of the Left and the PCF was clearly the big winner, with the Communists registering a 75-percent increase in seats. Neither the PCF gains nor the government losses, however, are as spectacular as they appear at first glance. In 1962 the PCF won fewer assembly seats but the number of votes cast for the party in both elections did not change proportionally to any significant extent. On the first ballot the PCF got 22.4 percent compared with 21.8 percent in 1962. On the second ballot the Communists dropped back to 21.5 percent, just slightly above the 1962 figure. In the same vein, the government did not suffer a net loss in the proportion of the total vote it obtained. The first ballot percentages for those who ran under the Gaullist label in 1962 and 1967 are almost exactly the same and, in 1967, the Gaullists actually gained a fraction on the second ballot.\* The left as a whole did register a two-percent increase, but the gains were made by the Federation and not by the Communists. The over-all result was thus a bipolarization of the electorate, with the Center suffering the major losses.

5. The lesson that left-wing unity was the key to election success will not be lost on either the Federation or the Communists, but they will have difficulty in preserving unity in the assembly. The Federation refused to negotiate a common program with the PCF as a part of their electoral agreement, and both sides are now muting their talk about the desirability of joint postelection action. Even if the two can agree on a point of attack, their chances of effectively challenging the government are minimal. On most foreign policy issues both are close to the government position. On a few issues, such as the Atlantic Alliance, the Federation might want to moderate the

\* In 1967, 12 Center deputies, who were not officially a part of the Gaullist assembly bloc but who regularly supported the government, ran under the Fifth Republic label and are thus included in the percentages. In 1962, however, these same deputies ran under a Center label and thus are not included in the Gaullist totals for that year.

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government's policy slightly but it cannot count on the PCF for support. On a number of domestic issues the two might unite against the Gaullists but would be unlikely to pick up much support from the Center, whose views more closely parallel those of the government.

6. De Gaulle, then, probably banks on the fact that, on any given issue, one segment of the opposition will find itself more in accord with the government than with its opposition partners. Since under the French system the assembly can oust a government only by passing a motion of censure by a majority vote, the General can move rather freely unless his own deputies defect to the opposition.

7. Federation leaders must recognize that the election has greatly fortified the voice of the PCF in determining the direction and policies of the left. Their task is complicated by the fact that a large number of Federation seats were won with PCF votes. Moreover, most of the leaders themselves owe their seats to Communist backing. At present the Federation remains under the leadership of Francois Mitterrand, but Pierre Mendes-France, long the most eminent spokesman of the non-Communist left, might take a more active role in directing the left now that he has regained his assembly seat. A combined left under his guidance would probably be a more formidable opposition than one under Mitterrand.

8. Since De Gaulle's return to power, the PCF has step by step pulled itself out of the isolation to which it had been confined in the late 1940s and 1950s. De Gaulle's policy of cultivating Eastern Europe and the USSR and his espousal of other foreign policies which the PCF could readily support have facilitated the party's return to respectability. The willingness of the non-Communist left to include the PCF as a partner in the presidential and the legislative elections was both a recognition of the Communist Party's success in identifying itself with leftist objectives and a further push of the PCF along the road to political respectability. The extent to which the Communists have succeeded in erasing their image as a "party of the East" is indicated by a national poll which showed 40 percent of the people willing to accept Communist ministers in the government. Although there was dissension in the PCF

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prior to the election over the desirability of further identification with the non-Communist left, the party's electoral success should effectively quell that minority.

Vacuum in the Center

9. The real loser in the election was Jean Lecanuet's Democratic Center, which failed to muster even the 30 seats necessary for recognition as a parliamentary grouping and thus for committee assignments. There are, however, 8 to 13 deputies, many of whom were elected with Center support, who have privately signified their intention or inclination to join Lecanuet's group. On the other hand, the Center can expect attempts by the Gaullists to detach some deputies, particularly those who owe their seats to Gaullist withdrawals after the first round. Recognizing that the Gaullist camp is still a strong point of attraction for his deputies, Lecanuet is taking the line that the Center will not be "unconditionally" against the government in the assembly. In any event, Lecanuet has indicated he thinks it unlikely that his deputies would be willing to associate themselves with any leftist initiative to introduce a censure motion early in the new session.

Dissidence in the Majority

10. The government majority still commands enough support to enable it to push through most of its programs. Additional votes might be picked up from unaffiliated conservative deputies, several of whom owe their seats to Gaullist withdrawals after the first round, and occasionally from Center deputies. One key to the government's success will be whether it can weld its somewhat disparate elements into a cohesive majority. Left-wing Gaullists will find it difficult to be consistently responsive to De Gaulle.

11. A more important factor which may force the government to do a little more bargaining in its own camp was the 40-seat loss suffered by the hard-line Gaullists and the concomitant gains made by the

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Gaullist-allied Independent Republicans. Despite objections by Premier Pompidou, Independent Republic leader and ex - Finance Minister Valery Giscard d'Estaing insists that his group continue to exist as a separate political formation in the new assembly. Moreover, Giscard has indicated that he will not permit the government to bypass the parliamentary process when major policies are at issue. Giscard will be constrained, however, by his own ambition to play a larger role in a post - De Gaulle era. The ex-minister doubtless learned the lesson from the election that to vie for the center vote is not particularly profitable. Thoroughly unacceptable to the left, Giscard must therefore depend on the Gaullists to advance his own political fortunes. To play too independent a role within his own majority would thus be to alienate his potential supporters.

Use of Executive Power

12. Despite the narrow margin which the majority holds, De Gaulle is unlikely to alter his policies significantly. The more controversial issues during the five-year reign of the last assembly were foreign policy questions, many of which were never brought to a vote or even discussed in the legislature. De Gaulle's tendency to consider the conduct of foreign policy as exclusively an executive prerogative makes it unlikely that he will come to parliament to seek voluntary advice and consent. Moreover, while the government may ask for a vote of confidence on any policy, it is not obliged to do so. If the assembly is recalcitrant, the President can threaten it with dissolution, a step he cannot repeat, however, for a year following the election of another assembly.

13. Resorting to the most extreme measure available, the President could ignore the assembly and rule under the emergency powers of Article 16 of the constitution. Such a drastic recourse is unlikely, however, and its constitutionality would be open to question. In the final analysis, De Gaulle probably will not find it necessary to use the more

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powerful weapons which the constitution affords him. He is reported to be unconcerned about the election returns, taking the line with his cabinet that the important election was the presidential race in 1965, in which he was returned for a seven-year term.

Pressures for Policy Changes

14. Pressure either from the opposition or from within the majority for policy changes is more likely to center on domestic than on foreign policy. Foreign affairs issues are secondary in the election, and it is thus difficult to use the gains or losses of various groups as evidence of public opinion on such issues. The very fact that De Gaulle's foreign initiatives were not at issue, however, is itself an indication that the opposition did not find enough public interest to justify campaigning on them. It is true that the Democratic Center, which most openly opposed two of De Gaulle's major policies--disentanglement from NATO and independence within the EEC--also suffered the heaviest losses. This was perhaps partially offset by the fact that the Giscardien wing of the Gaullists supported a greater movement toward Europe and made electoral gains despite over-all losses within the majority.

15. The gains made by the left, which concentrated its fire during the campaign on the government's economic and social policies, more obviously reflect widespread dissatisfaction with Gaullist policies in that field. The desire for a shift in emphasis from such prestige objectives as nuclear arms and foreign aid to increased expenditures on public housing, schools, and regional development is evident from the extreme left through the center and into the Gaullist ranks. Left-wing Gaullists have already publicly made clear their dissatisfaction with the government's failure to move forward in these fields. A member of the Pompidou government has indicated, however, that the government lacks funds to implement extensive social welfare programs and plans instead to concentrate on improving the "presentation" of existing programs.

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16. Nonetheless, observers close to De Gaulle feel he is now personally committed to putting a new social plan into effect and will take the offensive in pressing for change. The government will concentrate on adjusting taxes and social security, eliminating some of the pressures on industry, encouraging expansion of the economy and training of personnel and restructuring of industry. The margin for effecting change is narrow, however, because De Gaulle will not renounce the nuclear program or endanger the foundation of the economy with inflationary measures.

Outlook

17. The short-term preoccupation of the government at this juncture is to ensure that the Gaullist majority is intact when parliament convenes on 3 April. The 22 cabinet ministers who were elected deputies are crucial to the government if it is to retain control of such key assembly posts as the presidency and chairmanship of standing committees. French law stipulates, however, that ministers cannot sit in parliament. The law says further that a man holding a dual post as deputy and minister must decide within one month which he chooses and, until that time, neither he nor his alternate can vote. For this reason, most or all of the present ministers are expected to resign on 1 April so they can take their assembly seats and vote.

18. A new government will probably be formed around 5 or 6 April, with Premier Georges Pompidou, Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, and Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Michel Debre expected to retain their portfolios. During the 30-day period when neither a newly appointed minister nor his alternate can vote, the government will probably avoid either asking for a vote of confidence or introducing any controversial legislation which might prompt a vote of censure.

19. In the long run, the election appears to have pushed the parties toward a goal De Gaulle has long sought: a simplification and clarification of the political spectrum. The instability

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which plagued the Fourth Republic was eliminated in large part in the Fifth Republic through the institution of a strong presidential--rather than parliamentary--system. The multiplicity of parties which characterized the earlier republic remained an unwelcome and unstable feature of the Fifth Republic, however, and earlier attempts to transcend old party loyalties had been abortive. The stability of the parties will become an even more critical factor when De Gaulle leaves the scene, for no successor is likely to wield the same power.

20. Whether the present polarization between left and right will continue and whether it will prove beneficial are moot questions. The left without the Communists tends to be impotent, but with the Communists it could prove to be a threat to France's present orientation and institutions. At the same time, the future of the Gaullist parties without De Gaulle is uncertain. While these parties have managed to improve their organizational structure, they still lack the grass-roots ties which characterize the traditional parties. If De Gaulle serves out his term until 1972, both left and right parties might use that time profitably to prepare themselves for the time when the parliament will regain at least a degree of its former ascendancy.

21. The likelihood that De Gaulle, so long as his health permits, will remain in office seems greater as a result of the election. Had the Gaullists won a resounding majority, he might have felt it possible to retire in mid-term, leaving his ministers and deputies to carry on his program.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: **The Honorable Francis M. Bator**

The attached memorandum contains our analysis of the recent French National Assembly elections. I think you will find particularly interesting our assessment of the factors which contributed to the Gaullist losses and of the short- and long-term impact of the outcome on De Gaulle's policies.

*/S/*  
**E. Drexel Godfrey, Jr.**  
**Director, Office of Current Intelligence**

21 March 1967  
(DATE)

Memo Control Form

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Dates: Dissem  
SUBJECT: **French Elections: Results and Outlook**

REQUESTED OR ORIGINATED BY: **WH/Bator**

PURPOSE: **Domestic and foreign policy outlook in light of election results.**

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\*\*\*In his weekly letter.

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24 March 1967

**MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. George Carroll**  
Assistant to the  
Vice President

**SUBJECT : French Elections:**  
Results and Outlook

Mr. Smith suggests that this  
memorandum on the French elections be  
added to the Vice President's trip  
book.



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**Attachment:**  
Intelligence Memorandum  
No. 0628/67

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24 March 1967

Talking Paper on Memorandum: French Elections: Results and Outlook

1. This memorandum was requested by Mr. Bator of the White House Staff. Mr. Bator, who handles political matters, indicated there was great interest in a run-down on the elections.

2. The memorandum deals with the factors which contributed to the Gaullist losses in the 12 March parliamentary elections, stressing particularly the collaboration among the leftist groupings. Strains both within the left opposition and within the majority coalition are discussed. The Memo indicates that pressures will be brought to bear on the government for policy changes, particularly in the social and economic sphere but concludes that De Gaulle will be able to keep his major policies intact although he will try to improve the social welfare aspects of his program.

3. We recommend routine internal and external dissemination and ask also that it be released for inclusion in the briefing package for Vice-President Humphrey.

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